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GUILLERMO DÍAZ-CANEJA

If art involves largely the truthful depiction of familiar scenes, then Guillermo Díaz-Caneja is an artist. However, this Spanish author would be the first to disapprove exaggerated praise for his novels. Sincerity is the keynote of his nature, and devotion to truth is the striking characteristic of his literary work.

As has been said by so weighty an authority as José Rodríguez Carracido: "Señor Díaz-Caneja draws his characters from the life roundabout him." In his novels the reader becomes acquainted with the Spanish people as they really are; he encounters the people of Madrid, or of the provinces, in an ordinary setting, playing their parts as in real life, rather than as actors and actresses tricked out to assume a rôle on the stage. Their value to the American reader is mainly due to this fact. Moreover, his work is never dull and heavy; instead of wading through long pages of tedious description, the mental impression is gained swiftly by character drawing done with a few incisive lines and by happy turns of conversation.

Señor Díaz-Caneja is a quiet, unassuming student of life, an impassioned observer, whose studies of actualities result in novels. He is an ardent admirer of Benito Pérez Galdós, and at the beginning of his literary career he was a frequenter of the house of "Don Benito," as Galdós was affectionately called. Díaz-Caneja enjoys a certain advantage in not having been influenced by foreign literatures; thus his work becomes a peculiarly Spanish expression. He concerns himself less with accounts of social excesses, with the corruption of urban manners, than did Pereda, or Galdós, although he is in an advantageous position for observing every side of life, on account of his official connection with the Spanish Senate. His stories are more frequently constructed with the Spanish home for a background. In "El Sobre en Blanco" (The Unaddressed Envelope) the conflict wages between the domestic hearth and the theatre. Alberto Galván, the young husband, is a typical Spaniard in his viewpoint concerning woman's sphere and the sanctity of the home, and in his estimate of the perversity of modern standards. María Quer, the wife, less fortunate as a child in her home surroundings than Alberto, is beguiled by the fleeting and costly pleasures of the hour. She demands independence and the right to live her own life. The same question, it seems, that has convulsed England, and that has been so

magnanimously settled by the men of the United States, is beginning to stir Spain. Against his better judgment, Alberto consents to his wife's appearance upon the stage. Friction develops into tragedy, but, in the end, the home triumphs. For this reason, coinciding as it does with the Spanish masculine viewpoint, and because of the excellence of its literary quality, "El Sobre en Blanco" received the prize of the Spanish Academy.

The pictures of the "old-school" Spanish parents in "El Sobre en Blanco," and in the two volumes that preceded it, "La Deseada," and "La Pecadora," as well as in a more recent book, "Pilar Guerra," every reader will remember with satisfaction. They bring the realization that from homes founded by sterling, honorable people of this solid old type have come the men and women who have done most to honor the Spanish nation. "La Deseada," telling the story of the ruination of another home, and the wreck of the lives of some of the members through the drunkenness of the young man who had been upright until his better instincts were deadened by the fumes of alcohol, might well exert an influence in a campaign against the evils of over-indulgence. Nevertheless, this is one of the most artistic and absorbing of the works of Díaz-Caneja, and is by no means suggestive of a tract. In "La Pecadora" the home is irrevocably, tragically destroyed through the baneful influence of "The Sinner" over the life of the young physician. The book is written in the form of a confession by the young doctor, when, now too late, with his devoted wife dead by her own hand, his parents having previously died broken-hearted, he threw off the shackles of passion that bound him to the woman of evil, and made the tragic revelation that it was he himself who had ruined the lives of those who were dear to him, and had blighted his own.

"El Sobre en Blanco" and "Pilar Guerra" are being dramatized for the Spanish stage. The action in these books, handled by capable Spanish dramatists, will undoubtedly make a strong appeal through this medium. Díaz-Caneja is fortunate in being gifted with a sense of humor, a quality somewhat rare among recent Spanish authors. Thus his books have the proportion and the balance so imperative for dramatic adaptation.

Díaz-Caneja may not be a genius, but he is a writer who works steadily, persistently, ever growing in popularity at home, and gaining wider recognition abroad. "He is not one of those," writes José Rodríguez Carracido, "who take their wares to market in the attitude of a mendicant for notoriety, attracting attention by the strident

notes of libertinism." It is believed that the recognition he has won is based upon something more enduring than that attained by many writers who claim indulgence for tales of an objectionable character under the pretense that these are demanded by the modern reader. His Spanish is rich, chaste, sonorous. It is slightly less easy to read than the Spanish of Pérez Galdós, who was not a little influenced in his style by the knowledge of English he acquired in his youth, and by his deep reading of Dickens. For that very reason the Díaz-Caneja books are better for the student, as they are more thoroughly Spanish.

A volume of short stories entitled "Escuela de Humorismo," which appeared in 1913, was the first book published by Díaz-Caneja. His most recent work, "El Vuelo de la Dicha," is a light, entertaining novel with its scene laid in a pueblo not far from the city of the Court. Happening to be published at a moment when Spain is overclouded by gloom because so many of her sons are being called to Morocco to combat the Moors, the book serves as a welcome relief to tense nerves, and is gaining wide circulation, carrying its message of good cheer.

The success of the novels of Guillermo Díaz-Caneja, the fact that they are running into one edition after another, proves that, notwithstanding the genre once sustained by Felipe Trigo, and which is perpetuated by Pedro Mata, Hoyos y Vinent, and countless others, the spiritual phase of existence is stronger than the material, and, in Spain, as here, the books that find their way into the home, and that give a worth-while fame to their authors, are those that may safely be put into the hands of the young.

The rapprochement of nations, so widely discussed and so greatly desired at present, is aided most effectually by mutual understanding of the actual lives of the people of different countries. Spain has had her period of extravagant romance, and she has her literature depicting the extraordinary phases of the gay life, but back of all that is the broad foundation of the multitude that is engaged soberly, seriously, in the tasks of bread-getting as the basis for the kindly joys of the home circle. These people are the rock on which the nation stands, and without which it would fall. It is to the credit of Díaz-Caneja that he finds in this class the material for his stories, which reveal the tragedies, the aspirations, and the triumphs of those who, more than all others, make the true Spain of today.

FRANCES DOUGLAS

NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA